




THE SWAN-GEESE

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17.10.88

Once there was a peasant and his wife and they had a little girl and a little boy.

"Daughter," said the Mother to her little girl, "we are going out to work, so look after your little brother. If you are a good girl and do not run out into the street we shall buy you a new kerchief."





Father and Mother went away, and Little Girl never stopped to think about what she had been told. She seated Little Brother on the grass under the window, ran out into the street and began to play with her friends, forgetting all about everything.

Suddenly a flock of Swan-Geese came flying up. They swooped down, caught up Little Brother and carried him off on their wings.

Little Girl came home, she looked, but alas!— Little Brother was gone. She ran here and there, but not a sign of him did she find. She began calling him, and she wept and sobbed, crying that she would catch it from Father and Mother, but Little Brother did not reply.

She ran out into the open field but there was nothing she could see save some Swan-Geese



flying beyond the dark forest. She knew then that it was they who had carried off her brother: folks said the Swan-Geese were wicked birds who stole little children.

So away ran Little Girl after the birds. She ran and she ran till she came to an Oven.

"Oven, Oven, tell me where the Swan-Geese have flown."

"Eat one of my rye cakes and I will tell you," said the Oven.

"What, me eat a rye cake? At home we do not eat even wheaten cakes."

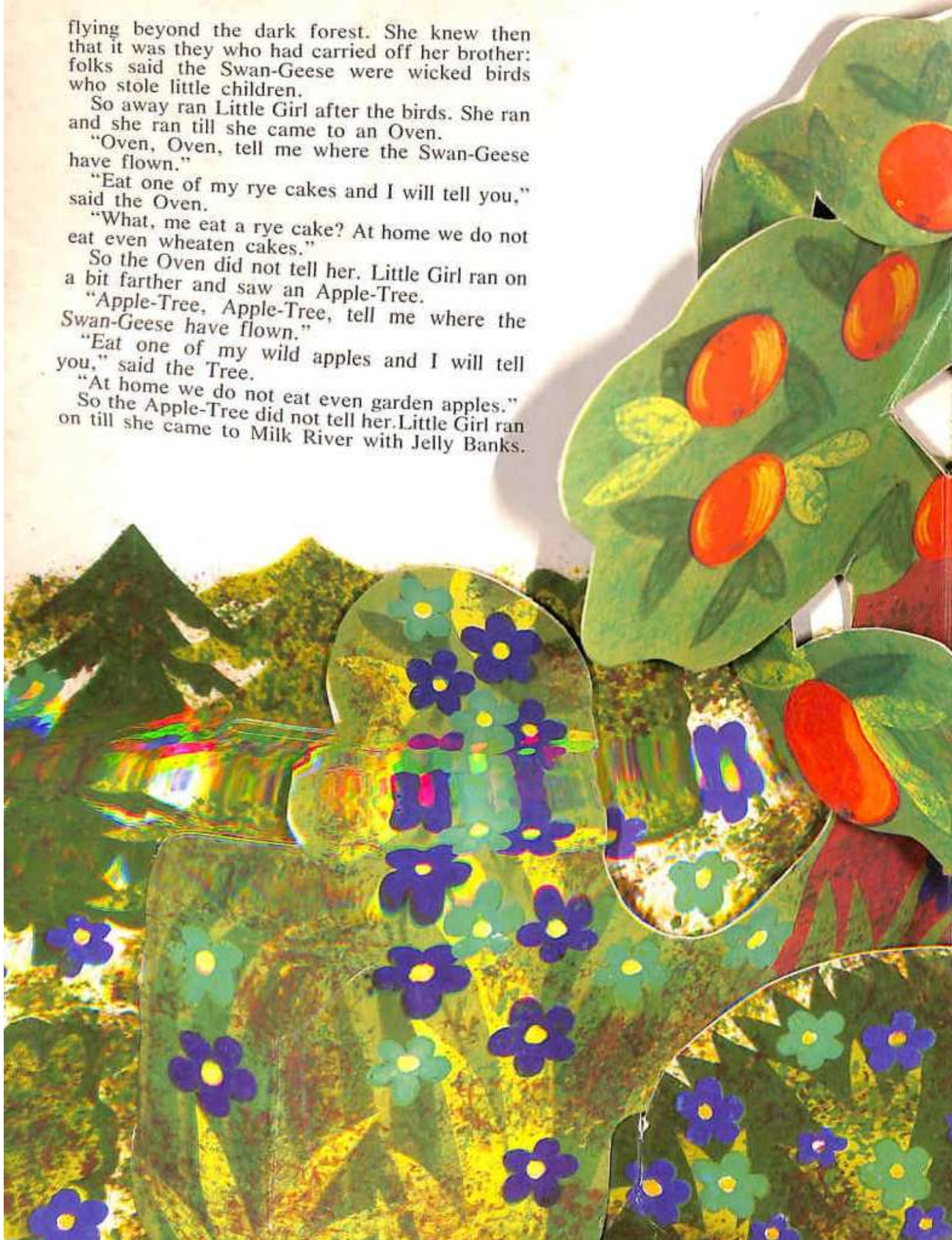
So the Oven did not tell her. Little Girl ran on a bit farther and saw an Apple-Tree.

"Apple-Tree, Apple-Tree, tell me where the Swan-Geese have flown."


"Eat one of my wild apples and I will tell you," said the Tree.

"At home we do not eat even garden apples."

So the Apple-Tree did not tell her. Little Girl ran on till she came to Milk River with Jelly Banks.








"Milk River with Jelly Banks, tell me
where the Swan-Geese have flown."
"Have some of my jelly with milk
and I will tell you."
"At home we do not eat even jelly
with cream."

So Milk River did not tell her. Little
Girl ran about the fields and woods for
a long, long time. And now day was
giving way to evening, and there was
nothing for her to do but go home. All
at once, what should she see but a hut
on hen's feet, very tidy and neat,
turning round and round without a
sound.





The hut had one window, and inside the hut sat Baba-Yaga the witch spinning tow. And on the bench sat Little Brother playing with silver apples.

"Good evening, Granny," Little Girl said.

"Good evening, lass. What brings you here?"

"In the fields and woods have I walked all day, over marshes and swamps have I made my way. My frock is wet through, so I've come to you to get warm."



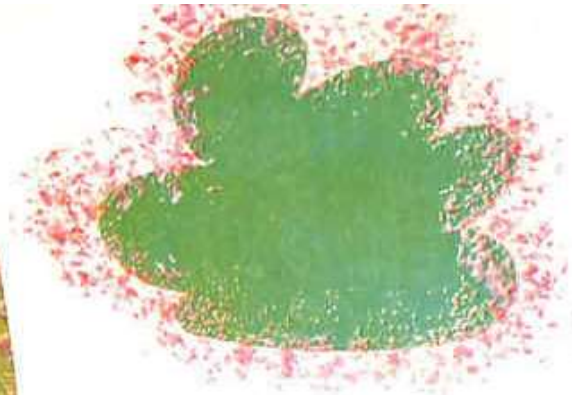
Little Girl ran until she came
to Milk River, and what should
she see but the Swan-Geese
coming after her and Little
Brother.

"Milk River, Milk River, hide
me, do!" cried Little Girl.

"Eat some of my plain fruit
jelly."

Little Girl ate some and said
thank you. So Milk River hid her
and her little brother in the
shadow of its Fruit-Jelly Banks.
And the Swan-Geese never saw
them and flew past.





Little Girl ran on again. But the Swan-Geese turned back and flew straight towards her. At any moment they might see her. What was Little Girl to do? On she ran and she came across the Apple-Tree.

"Apple-Tree, Apple-Tree, hide me, do!"

"Eat one of my wild apples."

Little Girl ate one quickly and said thank you, and the Apple Tree hid her and Little Brother among its leaves and branches.



The Swan-Geese never saw them and flew past.

Little Girl picked up her brother and ran on again. She ran and she ran and she had almost reached home when the Swan-Geese caught sight of her. They honked and flapped their wings, and in another minute would have torn Little Brother out of her arms. Little Girl ran up to the Oven.

"Oven, Oven, hide me, do!"

"Eat one of my rye cakes."

Little Girl popped a piece of cake into her mouth and herself crawled into the Oven with her brother.





The Swan-Geese flew round and round screaming and honking, but after a while they gave it up and flew back to Baba-Yaga. Little Girl said thank you to the Oven and ran home with her brother.

And before long Father and Mother came home too.







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A Russian Folk Tale

Translated by Bernard Lewis

Designed by V. Mayakovsky

Moscow Publishers

Moscow

Printed in the USSR

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